

Stephen M. Lyon  
23 Winter Street  
Willimantic, CT 06226

Juris Doctor Candidate 2014  
University of Connecticut  
School of Law

**Testimony Opposing Senate Bill 471**  
**“An Act Concerning Mental and Behavioral Health Services”**

Thank you Chairwomen Gerratana and Johnson and other members of the Joint Committee on Public Health for accepting my testimony.

My name is Stephen Lyon, from Willimantic, CT, and I am testifying against Senate Bill 471, An Act Concerning Mental and Behavioral Health Services, specifically §§ 1(b)(4), and 1(c)(4), because mandating mental health screenings involves the state government overstepping into an area in which parents should be the final arbiter, the definition of “mental health screening” is undefined, the list of those the bill allows to conduct such assessments is not structured stringently enough, and the bill’s Statement of Purpose is vague.

First, mandating mental health assessments moves the government outside of its bounds, into the role of the parent. Parents should be given deference regarding making decisions about their children’s health, especially in cases of mental health, where other children enrolled in the public school are not at risk, unlike issues of physical health. The assumption has always been, and should always be that parents know better than anyone else what is in the best interest of their children’s health, and this includes mental health.

Second, this bill is flawed in that no definition of mental health screening is provided. In fact, all that this bill did to change the current law regarding school health procedures, is to insert the words “mental” or “mental health screenings” in different places. Along with the obviously irresponsible drafting that is pointed out in the next paragraph, this entire bill is drafted irresponsibly. In any law making, but especially when our children’s health is on the line, vagueness of any sort is unacceptable. This bill does not state whether this is an in-depth psychological examination, or if it’s just a quick couple of questions that could be administered by almost anyone. It does not state the length of time, and it could be anywhere from five minutes or five hours (or more even). If any sort of law requiring mental health evaluations of school children is to be passed, and I do not concede that it should be, this committee and our representatives owe a duty to our children to provide careful drafting of all provisions, and not perform a basic “cut-and-paste,” as appears to be done in this bill.

Third, the bill does not sufficiently state necessary qualifications for those performing these evaluations. The only statement of qualifications is that in §1(a), where all assessments are grouped in generally, and the bill says they will be performed by, “(1) a legally qualified practitioner of medicine, (2) an advanced practice registered nurse or registered nurse, licensed pursuant to chapter 378, (3) a physician assistant, licensed pursuant to chapter 370, (4) a school medical advisor, or (5) a legally qualified practitioner of medicine, an advanced practice registered nurse or a physician assistant stationed at any military base...”. There is not one individual on this list qualified to evaluate the mental health of a child – these are specialists trained in physical health, not mental health. Further, even if a mental health professional were to be added to the list, this section allows any of these individuals to perform such screenings, not just the mental health professionals. This is irresponsible law making.

Finally, I oppose S.B. 471 because it is unclear and has an inadequate statement of purpose. It requires that each child being educated publicly be subjected to mental health screenings. However, the definition of “mental health screening” is not provided, the details of

how such assessments will be applied are absent, and the professional norms which are to be followed are not present. Further, the statement of purpose only states what the bill does, and forgets why it does what it does. It says that the purpose is to require mental health screenings for school age children, but it does not state the reason for which this is necessary; there needs to be more to the purpose of requiring mental health screenings than just stating that the legislature wants to mandate health screenings – there must be a real reason. The statement of purpose is also blatantly inaccurate on its face, unless the committee is being less than honest, as the only requirements in the bill are for children enrolling in public school, not those of school age, which would also include those enrolled in private or home education system.

For the foregoing reasons, that it invades the role of the parent, does not properly qualify mental health evaluators, and is vague and unclear, I oppose, and ask that this committee vote against, Senate Bill 471, “An Act Concerning Mental and Behavioral Health Services”.

Sincerely,

Stephen M. Lyon

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